OALEVELNOTES.COM

GROUP BEHAVIOR IN ORGANIZATIONS

Many of the issues studied in the psychology of work concern the behaviour of the individual. We look Motivation, job satisfaction, performance and rewards as they apply to the individual. However, behaviour at work takes place in a social context. We are all mostly engaged in group interaction, making decisions with others, agreeing, negotiating and unfortunately sometimes arguing.

Organisational psychology can lean heavily here on research in social psychology, but the relationship has often been the other way around. A good deal of what the ordinary psychology student learns in the area of social psychology has, in fact, been developed by psychologist working in the field, in companies and other organisations investigating how teams work, how groups and teams form, operate, solve problems and make decisions, how attitudes are changed, how conflict is managed and so on. This chapter selects some of the more important areas in the world of research and focuses upon:

- Group decision-making strategies and pitfalls
- Team roles and team building
- Sources and management of group conflict.

Work organizations are made up of individuals, but typically these individuals are tied together by their membership in particular work groups. A work group might be a department, a job classification, a work team, or an informal group of coworkers who socialize during lunch and after work to discuss work-related issues. Groups are very important to the functioning of work organizations, for a member of a group can pool their talents, energy, and knowledge to perform complex tasks. The study of work groups is an important topic in organizational psychology (Sanna & Parks, 1997).

A group can be defined as two or more individuals, engaged in social interaction, for the purposes of achieving same goal. In work setting, this goal is usually work-related, such as producing a product or service. However, groups at work may form merely to develop and maintain social relationships. Work groups may be either formal- put together by the organization to perform certain tasks and handle specific responsibilities- or informal, developing naturally. Informal work groups might include groups of workers who regularly get together after work to discuss their jobs. Groups can be referred to as belonging to certain types, and the classification of groups by type follows:

FORMAL OR INFORMAL - Groups can be classified as either formal or informal. In a formal group, important objectives and roles performed by members are predetermined. By contrast, the informal group develops in a spontaneous fashion, and the objectives and roles find in this type of group arise from the current interactions of members.

PRIMARY OR SECONDARY - Groups can also be classified as either primary or secondary. A primary group is small in size face-to-face contact is generally frequent, and relationships tend to be close and often intimate (family; playgroup). A secretary group assumes more of an impersonal nature and maybe geographically distant (company; school).

OALEVELNOTES.COM

108

GROUP DYNAMICS

A psychoanalytical view of the dynamics of a group recognises the group's emotional impact on the individual's behaviour because of considerations of conformity, loyalty, and identification with and reaction to the group. According to Freud, sexual impulses are inhibited, and identification with the leader takes place, though this could lead to envy and competition between members for the chance to replace the leader.

Boin (1961) refers to the unconscious contributions by members to the group mentality. He recognises existence of a mechanism below the surface of the group and made up of three functions, which has the express purpose of resolving group tensions. The three functions, are flight or fight (groups see its survival as being dependent on either fighting or fleeing); dependency (concerned with procedural matters so that it can feel secure); and pairing (two members of the group, one of whom could be the leader, express warmth which could lead to closeness). Anxiety and discomfort can arise as a result of the fight or flight function, security can stem from dependency and guilt can follow on from pairing because the group is not making headway in the task of changing the situation. Pressures are generated internally, arising from the dynamics of the group, as well as imposed externally. The psychoanalytic emphasises that dysfunctional aspects of group dynamics, but it should be noted that the working life of the group is not always dominated by these pressures.

COHESIVENESS

Cohesiveness refers simply to the amount or degree of attraction among group members. Cohesiveness is likely to exist when there is a high level of agreement among group members with respect to values, belief and objectives. This promotes the sharing of similar ideas and the mutual acceptance of such ideas. One would expect members of a cohesive group to agree among themselves on how best to achieve the objectives of the group, with an emphasis on the need for close cooperation in order to complete the various task and create conditions in which the personal needs of individuals are satisfied. Those who have studied cohesiveness emphasise the attractiveness of the group to members, the motivation of members to remain in the group and their resistance to leaving it (Mayo, Pastor & meindl, 1996).

Note: Please include points from the Textbook.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

109

GROUP DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES AND PITFALLS

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS GROUP DECISION MAKING

Many people think that meeting is a waste of time. They would rather sort out problems and make decisions on their own or with a like-minded colleague. Committee meeting is often seen as "all hot air" with effective decisions hugely made elsewhere (often beforehand by those in power).

Early work by Maier and Solem (1952) shows that group discussion gave members confidence that their solution was correct but did not guarantee a correct solution! On the TV show "who wants to be a millionaire?", When couples appear together, they often talk themselves into a wrong decision.

Maier and Solem also found that one group member with the correct answer will not always be fired and that for the group to be convinced it usually takes at least two people to argue the case. This finding squares with the work of Asch (1955), who showed that participants in his experiments were often influenced by a majority to agree with some quite obviously wrong solutions, for example that two obviously unequal lines were in fact equal. "Majority" were in fact, Confederates of the experimenter, students trained to give the wrong answer. Just two confederates could exert considerable influence and three produced almost the highest levels of conformity found in the experimental trials, while larger numbers actually produce slightly less conformity. The effect has been replicated many times and into the contemporary era. Despite the fact that most people did not conform very often, resisting the answer favoured by the rest of the group felt very uncomfortable for most of the participants. The lesson here is not so much that we might accept wrong answers from a group, but that we might be inhibited from giving our own view.

Crutchfield (1955 showed that this effect would occur outside the laboratory and with questions for which there was no correct answer. He managed to get 37% of US military officers to agree with the statement "I doubt whether I would make a good leader" even though they had just been selected for military leadership training.

Maier and Solem found that lower status individuals had less impact on group decisions. Asch showed that women and members of minority groups were more likely to conform to the group answer when their gender or minority status was emphasised by the nature of the rest of the group.

We shall consider all the factors that inhibit group members from speaking out when we discuss the phenomenon of Group Think below. We've probably all can easily remember occasions where we knew we should say something yet kept quiet for a peaceful life. However, here is particularly alarming as well as sad example of how fatal group pressure can be. The extract (Brown, 1988) is an actual corporate recording of an airline crew shortly before a crash:

OALEVELNOTES.COM

110

Captain: (In a relaxed voice) Well, we know where we are; we are all right.
Engineer: The boss has got it wired.
Co-pilot: I hope so
Captain: No problem
Co-Pilot: (Cautiously) Isn't this a little faster than you normally fly this John?
Captain: (Confidently) Oh yeah, but it's nice and smooth. We are going to get in right on time. Maybe a little ahead of time. We have called it made.
Co-pilot: (Uncertainly) I sure hope so.
Engineer: You know, John, dear know the difference between a duck and a co-pilot?
Capt: What's the difference?
Engineer: Well a duck can fly!
Captain: Well said!

This was in the last few minutes before the plane crashed. Here a majority of just two, including some security of rank, managed to silence a wise minority of one.

Research does give the edge to group decision making, *on the average*. The average group will make a higher-quality decision than the average individual. However, some research indicates that the best decision making individual – one who possesses all the information needed to make a high-quality decision – will be able to perform as well as or better than a group.

Perhaps the strongest argument for group decision making is that it leads to increased member satisfaction and greater member commitment to the course of action decided upon But what happens when the decision is a bad one? Research indicates that when this happens, members may increase their commitment to the poor decision (Bazerman, Guiliano & Appleman, 1984). If the poor decision was made by an individual, group members will not be as committed and may be more likely to see its faults and try another course of action.

In summary, although group decision making has certain limitations, it offers many advantages over individual decision making, particularly in improving the quality of decisions and in increasing the commitment to the decisions once they are made.

GROUP DECISION STRATEGIES

One of the most important processes in work groups is group decision making, which includes establishing group goals, choosing among various courses of actions, selecting new members, and determining standards of appropriate behaviour. The processes by which groups make these decisions have been of interest to organizational psychologists for many years.

As a rule, decision-making processes are at management level, and decisions are fed downwards through the organisation's structure. Where group decisions are made, these may be democratic, autocratic or by consensus.

AUTOCRATIC DECISION - making is the simplest and most straightforward strategy. It is the process by which the group leader makes the decision alone, using only the information that the leader possesses.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

The major advantage is that it is fast. However, because the decision is made based only on what s/he knows, the quality of the decision may suffer. An example could be the selection of a new computer package for a company.

A variation on the strict autocratic decision making approach occurs when the leader seeks information from group members to assist in reaching a decision, but still holds the final say. This is sometimes referred to as *consultative decision making*.

However, because the decision is made based only on what the leader knows, the quality of the decision may suffer. If the leader actually knows which program is the best for the group, there will be no drawback to the autocratic approach. If, however, the leader cannot make an informed choice, the decision may be faulty. In this cause, input from the group members would be helpful.

DEMOCRATIC DECISION MAKING - is a different strategy in which all group members are allowed to discuss the decision and then vote on a particular course of action. Typically, the outcome is based on a majority rule.

One advantage of this approach is that decisions are made using the pooled knowledge and experience of group members. Moreover, a greater number of alternatives may be considered. Also, because group members have a role in the process, they are more likely to follow the chosen course.

The most obvious drawback to democratic decision making is that it is time-consuming. Because it encourages conflict, it can also be inefficient. Finally, although it can result in a satisfied majority, there may be a unhappy minority who resists its implementation.

CONSENSUS - A strategy that overcomes some of the weaknesses of democratic decision making is to make decisions based on **consensus**. In this process, all group members, without exception, have agreed on the chosen course of action.

Because it is very time-consuming, this method is only used for very important decisions. For example, juries use this strategy because the decision taken affects the future freedom of the accused. Some company executive boards may strive for consensus when taking major decisions about changes in direction of the organisation or in organisational structure or company policy. As would be expected, the outcome of consensus decision making is usually a high-quality, highly critiqued decision, backed by all members of the group. The obvious drawback is the tremendous amount of time it may take a group to reach consensus, and in some cases it may not be possible.

GROUP DECISION MAKING PITFALLS

One might be forgiven for thinking that the committee is very conservative, low-risk arena. A classic work by Stoner (1961) showed that business students in groups tended to move towards more risky decisions than ones made by the individuals in those groups when asked alone. This was originally dubbed the risky shift phenomenon. However it was later shown that sometimes groups shifted to caution where group members were initially cautious as individuals (Fraser, 1971).

OALEVELNOTES.COM

112

When business executives decided on the ranking of investment projects, in a study outside the normal risky shift research studies, they agreed as a group to take more risky decisions than they have chosen as individuals.

The fact of committing oneself to a group decision is equivalent to lifting the burden of one's shoulders and transferring it to the group and, in the process, the commitment becomes more risky. Because each member receives less personal responsibility for potential roles, consensus is likely to move towards acceptance of more risk.

Risky shift are referred to as group polarisation. Group polarisation occurs when the attitudes and opinions of the group, in connection with an issue, change during a group discussion. The change or shift could be towards a risky or cautious shift.

GROUPTHINK PHENOMENON

Groups usually arrive at high-quality decisions because the alternative courses of action have been subjected to critical evaluation. This is particularly true in the case of consensus decision making, since even one deviant member can argue against a plan favoured by the rest. There is, however, an exception to this rule. A complex set of circumstances can sometimes occur that delays the critical evaluative process. What results is a complete back-firing of the normal critical decision making that result in hasty and often catastrophic decisions. The situation is termed *groupthink*. Groupthink is a process that occurs in highly cohesive decision making groups, where a pressure develops to arrive at an early decision thereby reducing the effectiveness of the group's ability to make high-quality, critical decisions.

At Hatfield in 2000 personnel were aware of cracks in the rails many months before the crash that was eventually caused by them. The US space shuttle Challenger exploded on takeoff in 1986 despite last-minute warnings by senior engineers.

Groupthink, a term coined by social psychologist Irving Janis (1972), occurs when a group makes faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of "mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment". Groups affected by groupthink ignore alternatives and tend to take irrational actions that dehumanize other groups. A group is especially vulnerable to groupthink when its members are similar in background, when the group is insulated from outside opinions, and when there are no clear rules for decision making. His point was that in the decisions preceding many disasters or business decisions, the consequences could and should have been anticipated.

Janis has documented eight symptoms of groupthink:

1. Illusion of invulnerability –Creates excessive optimism that encourages taking extreme risks.
2. Collective rationalization – Members discount warnings and do not reconsider their assumptions.
3. Belief in inherent morality – Members believe in the rightness of their cause and therefore ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions.
4. Stereotyped views of out-groups – Negative views of "enemy" make effective responses to conflict seem unnecessary.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

117

5. Direct pressure on dissenters – Members are under pressure not to express arguments against any of the group's views.
6. Self-censorship – Doubts and deviations from the perceived group consensus are not expressed.
7. Illusion of unanimity – The majority view and judgments are assumed to be unanimous.
8. Self-appointed 'mindguards' – Members protect the group and the leader from information that is problematic or contradictory to the group's cohesiveness, view, and/or decisions.

When the above symptoms exist in a group that is trying to make a decision, there is a reasonable chance that groupthink will happen, although it is not necessarily so. Groupthink occurs when groups are highly cohesive and when they are under considerable pressure to make a quality decision. When pressures for unanimity seem overwhelming, members are less motivated to realistically appraise the alternative courses of action available to them. These group pressures lead to carelessness and irrational thinking since groups experiencing groupthink fail to consider all alternatives and seek to maintain unanimity. Decisions shaped by groupthink have low probability of achieving successful outcomes.

In the Challenger disaster several of these factors operated. Political pressures to go ahead was powerful since the president was due to talk with the first ever civilian aboard a space flight, a school teacher who perished as her pupils washed the tragedy. Serious technical concerns were withheld from senior personal. Time after time the seal burn problem was considered in the light of growing evidence of danger and each time a new reason was found for it not to be considered critical. The day before launch the chief rocket engineer finally changed his mind and became a dissenter, but is views were neutralised by other authority figures.

Janis made some recommendations that, if followed should help avoid groupthink effects by keeping discussion open and being receptive to all the use, doubts and alternatives:

- Point devil's advocates to take contrary positions and raise questions
- Permit members to discuss issues with association outside the meeting
- Allow a period of second chance reconsideration of doubts and alternatives
- Leader to encourage all members to speak their mind and encourage the airing of doubts and criticism; this should be done in an atmosphere of personal respect

MINORITY VIEWS

Although we have seen that those in the minority often find it harder to get their views taken seriously, nevertheless small cruise do sometimes went round majorities. Moscovici (1985) conducted several studies of experimental groups with minorities primed to argue a contrary view. He concluded that, to succeed, minorities must confidently and consistently disagree with the majority even on issues other than the present case. The minority view needs to be realistic and consistently put. Nemeth (1986) argues that such minority views have the effect on the majority of taking them to reconsider their own, perhaps superficial, view of the plate.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

TEAM ROLES AND TEAM BUILDING

While groups are individuals working towards a goal, a team consists of interdependent workers with complementary skills working toward a shared goal or outcome. Teams are most appropriate when the task is complex, requiring individuals with varied skills and competencies to work together. That is why some researchers emphasize the importance of selecting the right individuals, based on members' knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics, for a particular team and team task (LePine, Hanson, Borman & Motowidlo, 2000).

Teams and groups are words that are used interchangeably. Some academics maintain that it is extremely difficult, if not possible, to distinguish between teams and groups, but others argue that there are differences between the two. For example a team could be described as a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, common performance goals, and a common approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. A team differs from the work group in its job category, authority and reward systems.

It is often much easier to form a group than a team. If you had a room filled with professional accountants, for example, they could be grouped according to gender, experience, fields of expertise, age, or other common factors. Forming a group based on a certain commonality is not particularly difficult, although the effectiveness of the groups may be variable.

A team, on the other hand, can be much more difficult to form. Members of a team may be selected for their complementary skills, not a single commonality. A business team may consist of an accountant, a salesman, a company executive and a secretary, for example. Each member of the team has a purpose and a function within that team, so the overall success depends on a functional interpersonal dynamic. There is usually not as much room for conflict when working as a team.

Most teams in the workplace are clearly identified-though one can find oneself being addressed as the team without ever being told there was one or being invited onto it. Managers who talk about their team are making an effort to get individual workers to realise that all their efforts are interdependent. If one person slacks, the rest must work harder, production is slowed down or another team is inconvenienced.

TEAM ROLES

Most organisations these days use some form of team building activity in order to motivate employees and make their working teams more effective. This is partly to offset those negative tendencies that occur in groups which we have already considered, but it is also to heighten people's awareness of their dependence upon one another.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

As Furnham (1997) claim there is little empirical evidence that team building procedures actually produce better performance or efficiency. One research for this is that it is difficult to measure outcomes that apply to a whole team (as against individuals) in a field setting. Hence it is difficult to measure team success. They are also very few measures of how people actually behave in teams. Most psychometric measures are of individual characteristics.

One classic self assessment questionnaire of team roles was developed by a Belbin (1993). Over nine years groups of managers were given a series of tests of intelligence and personality, various combinations were formed to produce the questionnaire. Despite criticisms, it stands out as a rigorous piece of research

He identified nine (originally eight) roles that are needed in a team. Usually some team members will perform more than one role or, in large teams, there can be duplicates, since not all teams have exactly 9 people in them. The roles are as follows:

Overall	Belbin roles	Description
Doing / acting	Implementer	Well-organized and predictable. A practical hard-working organiser who attends to detail and everyday task. Takes basic ideas and makes them work in practice.
	Shaper	Lots of energy and action, challenging others to move forwards and pushes the group towards decisions and actions. Can be insensitive.
	Completer/Finisher	Reliably sees things through to the end, ironing out the wrinkles and ensuring everything works well. Can worry too much and not trust others.
Thinking / problem-solving	Plant	Solves difficult problems with original and creative ideas and criticisms that lead to new solutions
	Monitor/Evaluator	Sees the big picture. Thinks carefully and accurately about things. May lack energy or ability to inspire others.
	Specialist	Has expert knowledge/skills in key areas and will solve many problems.
People / feelings	Coordinator	Respected leader who helps everyone focus on their task. Can be seen as excessively controlling.
	Team worker	Cares for individuals and the team. Good listener and works to resolve social problems. Provides emotional support, and shows care.
	Resource/investigator	Explores new ideas and possibilities with energy and with others. Good networker. An outgoing, adaptable communicator who makes external contacts and seeks information to bring to the team; tends to start things rather than finished them

OALEVELNOTES.COM

Where Belbin's questionnaire is used in team building exercises, participants use the results to identify and discuss the roles they prefer and those they usually occupy. A very important aspect of such training is to get each team member to recognise and value the role of others, even if it is something they cannot fully understand or appreciate. Success in this leads to greater awareness of the interdependence of each team member on each other and can help people understand why their colleagues behave differently to the way that they themselves do. It might also produce petty jealousies and help colleagues to see why some members should have different treatment which is not, in fact, preferential.

According to Furnham (1997) there is little psychometric evidence to support the validity or reliability of Belbin's measure of team roles. Senior and Swailes comment that there is very little evidence that people actually do occupy stable team roles. This conclusion is supported by a study that employed measures of personality and video observation and analysis of people taking part in business simulation exercises (Fisher, Hunter & Masrossen, 2001). Analysis of the data showed that the Belbin team role model lacked validity but that personality characteristics could well influence people's behaviour in teams.

According to Belbin's theory however, excellent teams require:

- A leader of the coordinator type who can see and use the strengths of every individual in the team in a patient manner. The person also needs to be able to generate the trust of others.
- A plant-for the novel solutions to problems in which the team is stuck.
- A range of thinking ability. Teams of a academics, for instance, can spend far too long in debate and criticism and not get on with action, whereas the well-balanced team will have doers and finishers within it.
- A widespread of the skills associated with the other roles in the model.
- An awareness of their own limitations. Remember the changes discussed in the section on group think. Self aware teams can adjust for deficiencies by locating members to missing roles and providing training where necessary to fill the gaps.

TEAM BUILDING

Team building, a common method of improving relationships within a group, is similar to process consultation except that all the members of a group participate together to try to improve their work interactions. The goal of team building is to improve the way group members work together. Team building does not focus on what the group is trying to achieve.

Team building is important when reengineering the way people from different functions work together. When new groups are formed, team building can help group members; quickly establish task and role relationships so that they can work effectively together. Team building facilitates the development of functional group norms and values and helps members develop a common approach to solving problems.

Dr Bruce Tuckman published his Forming Storming Norming Performing model in 1965. He added a fifth stage, Adjourning, in the 1970s. The Forming Storming Norming Performing theory is an elegant and helpful explanation of team development and behaviour. It is one of the best known team development theories and has formed the basis of many further ideas since its conception.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

Tuckman's theory focuses on the way in which a team tackles a task from the initial formation of the team through to the completion of the project. Tuckman's theory is particularly relevant to team building challenges as the phases are relevant to the completion of any task undertaken by a team.

Tuckman's model explains that as the team develops maturity and ability, relationships establish, and the leader changes leadership style. Beginning with a directing style, moving through coaching, then participating, finishing delegating and almost detached. At this point the team may produce a successor leader and the previous leader can move on to develop a new team.

1. FORMING - THE team is assembled and the task is allocated. High dependence on leader for guidance and direction. Individual roles and responsibilities are unclear. Time is spent planning, collecting information and bonding. Leader must be prepared to answer lots of questions about the team's purpose, objectives and external relationships. Processes are often ignored.

2. STORMING - The team starts to address the task suggesting ideas. Different ideas may compete for control and if badly managed this phase can be very destructive for the team. Relationships between team members will be made or broken in this phase and some may never recover. In extreme cases the team can become stuck in the Storming phase. If a team is too focused on consensus they may decide on a plan which is less effective in completing the task for the sake of the team. This carries its own set of problems. It is essential that a team has strong facilitative leadership in this phase.

3. NORMING - This tends to be a move towards harmonious working practices with teams agreeing on the rules and values by which they operate. In the ideal situation teams begin to trust themselves during this phase as they accept the vital contribution of each member to the team. Team leaders can take a step back from the team at this stage as individual members take greater responsibility. The risk during the Norming stage is that the team becomes satisfied and loses either their creative edge or the drive that brought them to this phase. Commitment and unity is strong. The team may engage in fun and social activities. The team discusses and develops its processes and working style. There is general respect for the leader.

4. PERFORMING - Not all teams make it to the Performing phase, which is essentially an era of high performance. Performing teams are identified by high levels of independence, motivation, knowledge and competence. Decision making is collaborative and dissent is expected and encouraged as there will be a high level of respect in the communication between team members.

5. ADJOURNING - This is the final phase added by Tuckman to cover the end of the project and the break up of the team. Some call this phase Mourning, although this is a rather depressing way of looking at the situation. More enlightened managers have called Progressive Resources in to organise a celebratory event at the end of a project and members of such a team will undoubtedly leave the project with fond memories of their experience.

Part (a)

OALEVELNOTES.COM

It should be noted that a team can return to any phase within the model if they experience a change, for example a review of their project or goals or a change in members of a team. In a successful team when a member leaves or a new member joins the team will revert to the Forming stage, but it may last for a very short time as the new team member is brought into the fold.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

SOURCES AND MANAGEMENT OF GROUP CONFLICT

Conflict can occur within groups or between them. Conflict is, unfortunately a fact of everyday working life. Everybody's needs and wishes cannot always be met and at some point there is bound to be a mismatch between what one group and another wants, or between management and employees. Looking at Belbin's team roles we can see that conflict will inevitably occur within a team as energetic, impatient shapers wants to go ahead against the advice of the computer coordinator.

Conflict is destructive at its worst. Consider the management team wishing to make cost cuts in order for the organisation as a whole to survive. Lower salaries are announced, longer hours and a few forced redundancies. The employees hold a protest meeting in work time. Everyday life is disrupted because everyone is angry or frightened. The productivity of the complaint increases under this atmosphere of disruption and begins a vicious cycle in which no one can win. For these reasons, if no others, organisations need to study the source of conflict and, more importantly, ways to manage it.

Conflict is a behaviour by a person or group that is purposely designed to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group (Gray & Starke, 1984). There are many typical instances of conflict between members of an organization, such as two delivery persons arguing over who gets to drive the new company truck, union and management representatives in heated negotiations over a new contract, or two applicants competing for a single job. Conflict in work organizations and in other areas of everyday life is indeed a common state of affairs.

The key element in the definition of conflict is that the conflicting parties have incompatible goals (Tjosvold, 1998). Conflict can have negative, destructive consequences, but it can also be constructive and lead to positive outcomes for work groups and organizations (Rahim, 1985).

SOURCES OF CONFLICT AT WORK

Kabanoff (1985) produced an analysis of the work context which saw most conflicts as the result of an interaction of any two of the sources of influence on work teams listed below:

- Informal: factors not part of the official organisational structure.
- Ability/knowledge: skills and knowledge that members possess.
- Assignment: the position of people and jobs in the communication framework.
- Authority: the Power attached to a role or person.
- Allocation: task, time or resources of freshly allocated to positions, jobs.
- Precedence: position or status of task or people.

OALEVELNOTES.COM

Examples of conflict between any two of these sources might be:

- Allocation/precedence: a group of secretaries argues that they should have new computers before the junior clerks received them.
- Abilities/authority: a senior sales assistant who is promoted to a lower management position but has poor delegation, supervisory and diplomatic skills.
- Assignment/location: a person from an isolated department who knows little of the rest of the organisation but is given the role of equal opportunities coordinator for the whole organisation.

Conflict in work groups and organisations comes from many sources. Robbins (1974) maintains that there are three sources of conflict:

STRUCTURE (including ambiguity, rewards)

If there is role ambiguity where employees are not certain what is and what is not part of their job, conflict is inevitable the same applies in the case of task ambiguity where employees are not clear how certain tasks should be performed.

The allocation of rewards (co-operative vs. competitively) is also a strong source of potential conflict. This will be heightened where the task of one individual or group is dependent upon another.

INTERDEPENDENCE OF TASK:

This conflict is heightened with the task of one individual or group is dependent upon another. For example where one group must work on a product only after a previous group has finished with it, there is a good chance of conflict.

COMMUNICATION:

Systems of communication within or between groups can have a significant effect on the kinds of experience that individuals have and on the ways in which information percolates through to all members of the organisation-formally or by the grapevine. Lack of appropriate information by an appropriate time is a very frequent complaint. If one crucial piece of information does not arrive then employees might spend a lot of effort performing a task that is now not required or needs to be done differently. People feel particularly aggrieved if they find that the junior know something before they do.

PERSONAL FACTORS

This covers personality and the value systems to which people adhere. Individuals, who are highly assertive, with a leaning towards low esteem, have within themselves the capacity to generate conflict. "Value systems" are a significant variable in the study of social conflict. They determine one's outlook and behaviour and can be seen as a significant force in prejudice, expressions of views about good and bad practices and the notions of equitable rewards

OALEVELNOTES.COM

121

Differences in personality and temperament mean that certain persons may be likely to engage in conflict. One of the most common sources of conflict results from the fact that certain individuals simply do not get along with each other (Labianca, Braas & Gray, 1998).

A final characteristic that can be a potential cause of conflict is age. A good deal of evidence indicates that younger workers are more conflict-prone than older workers, presumably because they have less to lose and more to gain from the outcomes of conflict situations (Robbins, 1974).

MANAGEMENT OF GROUP CONFLICT

To start positively, not all conflict needs to be managed. According to Riggio (1990) there are potential benefits from a contained level of conflict.

- Stimulate and motivate workers.
- Create innovation through the search for solutions.
- Induce the consideration of opposing views.
- Relieve unexpressed tensions.
- Raise standards through competition.

In the case of *intra-group conflict,* organisations often introduce some kind of team-building development. This is aimed at promoting co-operative working. One method that is often used to emphasise team members' dependence upon one another is Aronson's "jigsaw" technique. Team members are each given one piece of a puzzle and have to work with each other to discover the whole pattern. Only co-operation and sharing can produce a result for the group. Also relevant is Deutch's (1949) success with student co-operative groups.

One of the problems with trying to resolve conflict between groups (*intergroup conflict*) is that groups form very strong identities. The work of Tajfel showed how easily groups' identities are formed and how this leads to both prejudice and discrimination. Tajfel's work also showed that competition was not necessary for this process to be triggered.

In the workplace, we need to find ways of lessening the intergroup hostility and the introduction of **super-ordinate goals** is an effective way of achieving this(Sherif, White, Hood, 1961). It deals with resolving intragroup conflict by stimulating intragroup cohesiveness through the introduction of a common subordinate goal that is attractive to both parties. When a group is split over some minor issue, introducing a more important super-ordinate goal may draw the two sides together as they strive to attain the common goal.

Another way of reducing intergroup conflict comes from the "*contact hypothesis*". This is a popular strategy of bringing people together in order to reduce stereotypes. Sometimes this occurs through a friendly competition, a discussion or a party.

Research has shown that in order for this technique to work, certain criteria need to be met:

- Group members should not behave in ways that confirm existing stereotypes.
- Individuals need to be seen as typical of their group, otherwise they may not be seen as breaking the stereotype

OALEVELNOTES.COM

122

- Meetings should be informal so that personal relationships are possible.
- There must be opportunity for members to do things co-operatively
- The environment must support co-operative behaviour and stereotype reduction, with members not obviously performing token gestures.
- Members should have an equal status – this will be difficult in the workplace, but efforts can be made to remove status signals such as uniform and formal titles.

Thomas (1976, 1992) has identified some individual conflict resolution strategies:

- Accommodation- a conflict resolution strategy of making a sacrifice to resolve a conflict.
- Compromise- a conflict resolution strategy in which both parties give up some part of the goals.
- Collaboration- a conflict resolution strategy in which the parties cooperate to reach a solution that satisfies both.
- Avoidance- withdrawing from or avoiding a conflict situation.

While the two conflicting parties can take such steps to try to resolve their differences, managers, because of their status and power in the organization, can play a major role in resolving conflict between subordinates (Sheppard, 1974).

Weaving

ASSIGNMENT # 6

Horizontal or vertical strain?

Conflict in organisations can be of two types:

- **Horizontal** involves competition between functions, such as sales versus production, or research and development versus engineering.
- **Vertical** involves competition between hierarchical levels, such as management and workers.

(a) Describe what psychologists have found out about group behaviour in organisations. [8]

(b) Evaluate what psychologists have found out about group behaviour in organisations. [10]

(c) Using your psychological knowledge, suggest ways in which group conflict can be managed. [6]

See:
May2002, November 2005, May 2007, May 2009, May 2010/31, May 2010/32